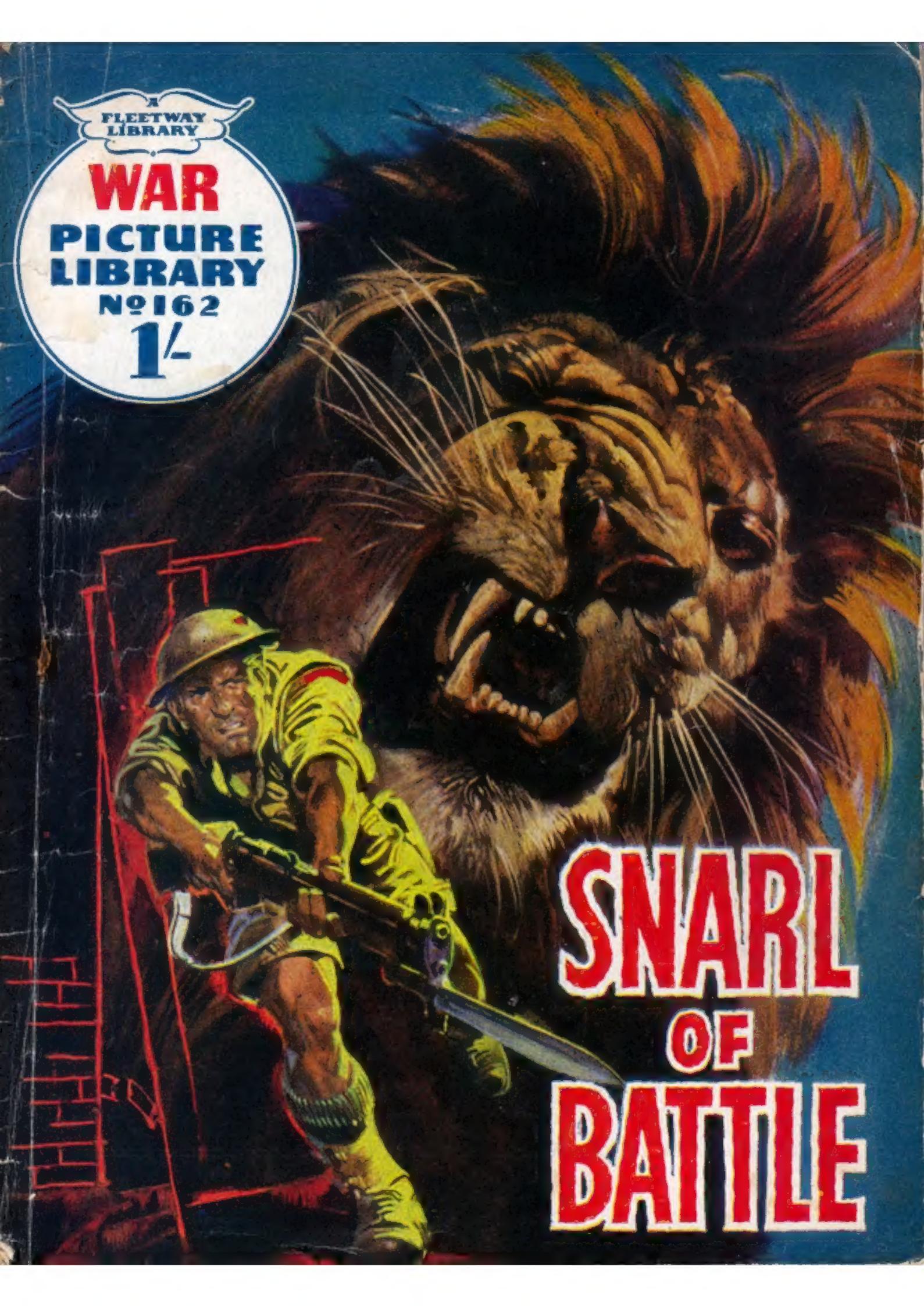


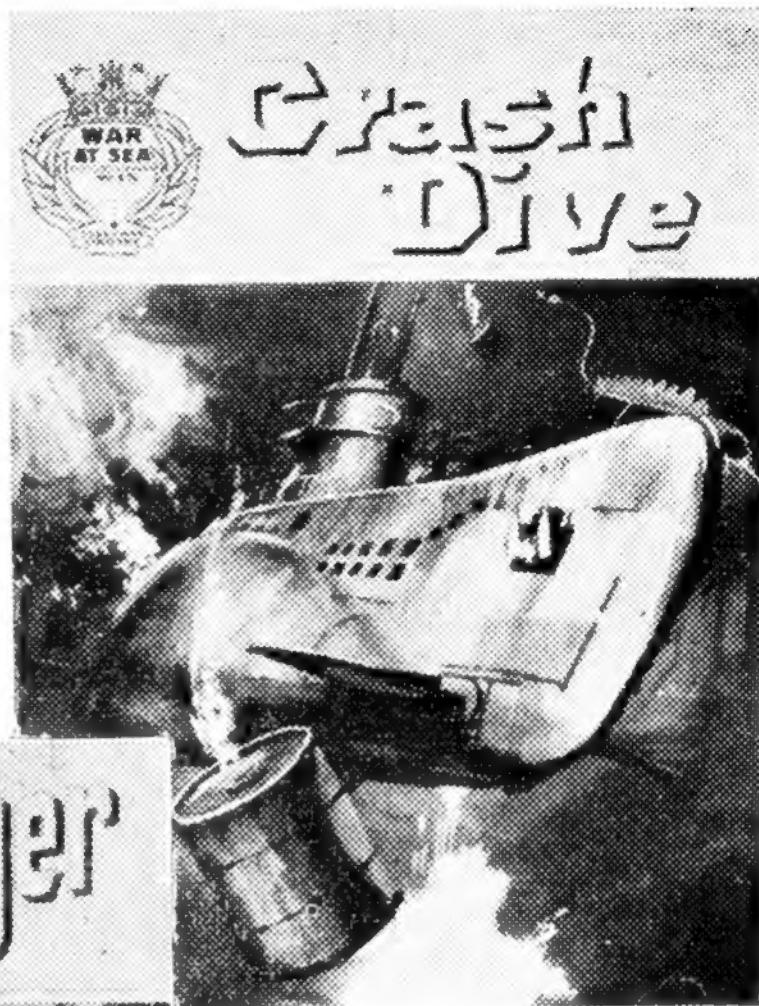
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SNARL OF BATTLE

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A SOLDIER AND HIS RIFLE ARE USUALLY GOOD FRIENDS, BUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CORPORAL TAGG AND HIS OLD LEE-METFORD WAS MUCH STRONGER THAN MERE FRIENDSHIP. TAGG LOVED THAT RIFLE. HE WOULD ALLOW NOTHING TO COME BETWEEN THEM...

Chapter 1. *The Lost Rifle*

THE WAR ON THE POLDAVO FRONT IN NORTHERN ITALY, IN THE EARLY SPRING OF 1945, HAD BEEN AT A COMPLETE STANDSTILL FOR SEVEN MONTHS...



BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND GERMAN ARMIES THAT SPRING, IN THE FLOWERING LOMBARDY FIELDS, THE BEES BUZZED AND THE BIRDS NESTED IN PERFECT PEACE...

MIND WHERE YOU'RE PUTTING
YOUR GREAT FEET, HIGGINS.
YOU NEARLY FLATTENED
THAT NEST...

SORRY, SARGE...



THE BRITISH ADVANCE THE YEAR BEFORE HAD PETERED OUT IN THE AUTUMN ON THE EDGE OF THE LOMBARDY PLAIN. SINCE THEN, THE PATROLS ON BOTH SIDES HAD TAKEN GOOD CARE TO AVOID EACH OTHER...



THESE MEN HAD BEEN FIGHTING FOR FIVE FURIOUS YEARS, ACROSS LIBYA AND INTO SICILY AND UP THE BONY SPINE OF ITALY. THEY RELISHED THE PEACE AND QUIET OF THE POLDAVO FRONT...



Snarl Of Battle

IT WAS CORPORAL TAGG WHO WAS FATED TO BRING THE PEACEFUL SCENE TO AN END. NOT THAT HE MEANT TO. THE TROUBLE WAS HIS RIFLE...

WHEN DID THEY ISSUE YOU THAT RIFLE, CORP? THE CRIMEA?

DON'T SHOW YOUR IGNORANCE, SMILER... THAT WAS THE LATEST SECRET WEAPON AT WATERLOO, WASN'T IT, CORP?



CORPORAL TAGG'S RIFLE WAS A LEE-METFORD, AN EARLIER VERSION OF THE STANDARD SHORT MAGAZINE LEE-ENFIELD WHICH WAS GENERAL ISSUE TO THE BRITISH ARMY OF WORLD WAR TWO...

GARN... YOU DUFF-FINGERED SWIVEL-EYED FOOT-BASHERS WITH YOUR COMMON LITTLE LEE-ENFIELDS... I'LL SHOW YOU... SEE THAT MOLEHILL DOWN THERE?



TAGG'S PRIDE IN HIS LEE-METFORD WAS A LEGEND IN THE SIXTH RIFLES. THE MEN OF HIS SECTION GRINNED AS HE CUDDLED THE WELL-POLISHED BUTT TO HIS SHOULDER...



THE TARGET WAS AT A LONG RANGE, BUT CORPORAL TAGG'S RIFLE HAD A GOOD STRAIGHT CARRY. THE BULLET FETCHED IT A CRACK ALL RIGHT, ONLY IT WAS NOT A MOLEHILL...



THE GERMAN OFFICER WAS AN AFRIKA KORPS VETERAN. HE WAS JUST AS KEEN ON PEACE AND QUIET AS HIS BRITISH COUNTERPARTS, BUT HE LOST HIS HEAD AT THIS UNPROVOKED ASSAULT...

SO THE ENGLANDERS WISH TO FIGHT, DO THEY? ATTACK! ATTACK!



Snarl Of Battle

SEVEN RESTFUL MONTHS HAD NOT SAPPED THE FIGHTING SPIRIT OF THE BRITISH VETERANS. THEY CURSED THE CORPORAL HEARTILY AND WHEELED TO FACE THE GERMAN CHARGE...



THIS WAS THE FIRST REVIVED SPARK OF BATTLE ON THAT PEACEFUL SECTOR OF THE FRONT BUT IT WOULD SOON BE FANNED INTO A FLAME...



Snarl Of Battle

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WHILE THE TWO PATROLS CLASHED ON THE SLOPE BELOW HIM, THE BRITISH SIGNALLER HURRIEDLY CALLED HIS HEADQUARTERS...



THE GERMAN SIGNALLER, WITH HIS EYE ON THE STRUGGLING FIGURES ABOVE HIM, WAS JUST AS BUSY . . .



FOUR SECTION'S MESSAGE EVENTUALLY REACHED BRITISH DIVISIONAL HEADQUARTERS BEHIND THE POLDAVO FRONT, WHERE IT SET THE PONDEROUS MACHINERY OF HIGH COMMAND IN MOTION . . .



Snarl Of Battle

AT THE GERMAN DIVISIONAL HEADQUARTERS FIFTY MILES AWAY, A SIMILAR MESSAGE HAD PROVOKED A SIMILAR REACTION...



REFRESHED BY THEIR SEVEN-MONTH HOLIDAY FROM WAR, THE TWO ARMIES SWUNG INTO ACTION WITH SPEED AND EFFICIENCY. WITHIN A FEW HOURS, THE POLDAVO FRONT WAS ABLAZE WITH ACTION...



Snarl Of Battle

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MEANWHILE, THE SPARK WHICH HAD TOUCHED OFF THE EXPLOSION WAS STILL GLOWING BRIGHTLY ON THE GREEN SLOPES OF PEPPEROT HILL . . .



THE MAN WHO HAD TOUCHED OFF THE SPARK WAS STILL CLUTCHING HIS PRECIOUS RIFLE . . .



Snarl Of Battle

CORPORAL TAGG WAS MUCH MORE CONCERNED WITH THE WELFARE OF HIS LEE-METFORD THAN WITH THE OUTCOME OF THE BATTLE HE HAD STARTED. FOR HIM, THAT BATTLE ENDED SUDDENLY...



WHEN CORPORAL TAGG WAS KNOCKED UNCONSCIOUS BY THE BUTT OF A CLUMSY MAUSER, THE GERMANS WERE ALREADY BEGINNING TO WITHDRAW...



Snarl Of Battle

11

BUT THAT DAY, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIVE FURIOUS YEARS OF WAR, CORPORAL TAGG AND HIS BELOVED RIFLE WERE PARTED...



AND SO CORPORAL TAGG LEFT THE FIELD OF BATTLE IN ONE DIRECTION, WHILE HIS OLD LEE-METFORD LEFT IT IN THE OTHER...



Chapter 2. Museum Piece

CORPORAL TAGG'S RIFLE DISAPPEARED INTO AN UNKNOWN CORNER OF THE BRITISH LINES. TAGG HIMSELF WAS SENT BACK TO A BASE HOSPITAL. BUT TWO DAYS LATER HE WAS MUCH RECOVERED...



THE DOCTORS GLANCED WORRIEDLY AT THE CORPORAL'S GLOOMY FACE...

WHILE TAGG WAS UNCONSCIOUS HE KEPT BABBLING ABOUT A FRIEND HE'D LOST IN THAT BATTLE... A CHAP CALLED LEE METFORD...

GIVE HIM SEVEN DAYS' LEAVE — THAT SHOULD CHEER HIM UP...



BUT CORPORAL TAGG WAS STILL GLOOMY WHEN HE BOARDED THE LEAVE-TRUCK NEXT DAY. IT WAS HIS RIFLE HE WANTED, NOT LEAVE. HE LOOKED SLIGHTLY HAPPIER WHEN HIS SERGEANT APPEARED...

HALLO, TAGG... BIT OF ALL RIGHT, EH—SEVEN DAYS IN ROME?

TO HELL WITH ROME... LOOK, SARGE, DID YOU SEE WHAT HAPPENED TO MY LEE-METFORD AFTER I GOT CLOUTED?





THE BATTLE ON THE POLDAVO FRONT WAS IN FULL SWING NOW. THERE WAS A LOT OF TRAFFIC MOVING UP THE ROAD IN THE DIRECTION OF THE FIRING LINE. AND THAT WAS THE WAY CORPORAL TAGG WANTED TO GO...



Snarl Of Battle

BUT TAGG WAS JUST A MAN WITH ONE THOUGHT ON HIS MIND — TO GET HIS PRECIOUS RIFLE BACK. TOWARDS EVENING, HE NEARED THE FRONT LINE . . .



IT WAS GETTING DARK WHEN TAGG FOUND THE VILLA, BUT THERE WERE ARMED GUARDS ON THE GATE AND THEY WERE TAKING SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS . . .



CORPORAL TAGG'S QUESTION WAS ANSWERED WHEN HE TURNED ROUND. HE HEARD THE SNIP OF WIRE-CUTTERS, THEN HE SAW A DARK FIGURE CROUCHING BY THE FENCE . . .



THE SHADOWY FIGURE MOVED STEALTHILY ACROSS THE LAWN TOWARDS THE FRENCH WINDOWS. TAGG FOLLOWED. THE VOICES OF THE COLONEL ENTERTAINING HIS GUEST, THE GENERAL, CAME CLEARLY THROUGH THE WINDOWS . . .



Snarl Of Battle

TAGG HAD REACHED THE TERRACE NOW IN THE WAKE OF THE DARK FIGURE. HE PEERED THROUGH THE NEAREST FRENCH WINDOW HIS EYES BULGED...

I SAY,
BROWN, CLOSE
THE BLACKOUT
CURTAINS,
WILL YOU?

COR...
DEAD ON
TARGET... THERE
IT IS AS LARGE
AS LIFE... MY OLD
LEE-METFORD!



CORPORAL TAGG'S BELOVED RIFLE WAS A MERE SIX FEET AWAY FROM HIM NOW, ONLY IT WAS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL. ONCE AGAIN, THE PROBLEM WAS SOLVED FOR HIM BY THE DARK FIGURE...



THE FRENCH WINDOW WAS OPEN WHEN TAGG GOT TO IT. HE BEGAN TO HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS. THE DARK FIGURE WAS BEHAVING ODDLY FOR A MAN WITHOUT A LEAVE PASS. BUT THE RIFLE WAS SO TANTALISINGLY NEAR...



THE DARK, MYSTERIOUS FIGURE WAS BENDING DOWN BEHIND THE CURTAIN WITH HIS EYE TO THE CRACK OF LIGHT WHEN TAGG STEPPED THROUGH THE WINDOW BEHIND HIM . . .



THE OFFICERS OF THE SOUTH LOUGHSHIRE REGIMENT WERE NOT USED TO SUCH METHODS OF ENTRY INTO THEIR MESS THEY GOGGLED IN AMAZEMENT. AT LAST, THE GENERAL ACTED . . .



Snarl Of Battle

BEHIND THE CURTAINS, CORPORAL TAGG FROZE AND HELD HIS BREATH...

I AM NO SPY, SIGNORE... MY NAME IS CAPPODOCCI AND THIS IS MY OWN VILLA THAT THE BRITISH ARMY COMMANDERED FROM ME!

A LIKELY STORY!



DON'T BE HASTY, HENRY... THIS PLACE IS CALLED THE VILLA CAPPODOCCI!

THE OFFICERS HAD GATHERED AROUND THE ITALIAN. CORPORAL TAGG, WITH A HUNGRY EYE ON HIS RIFLE, SEIZED HIS OPPORTUNITY...

HANG IT ALL, CEDRIC, HAVE THE FOLLOW QUESTIONED SOMEWHERE ELSE. HE'S QUITE TAKEN AWAY MY APPETITE!

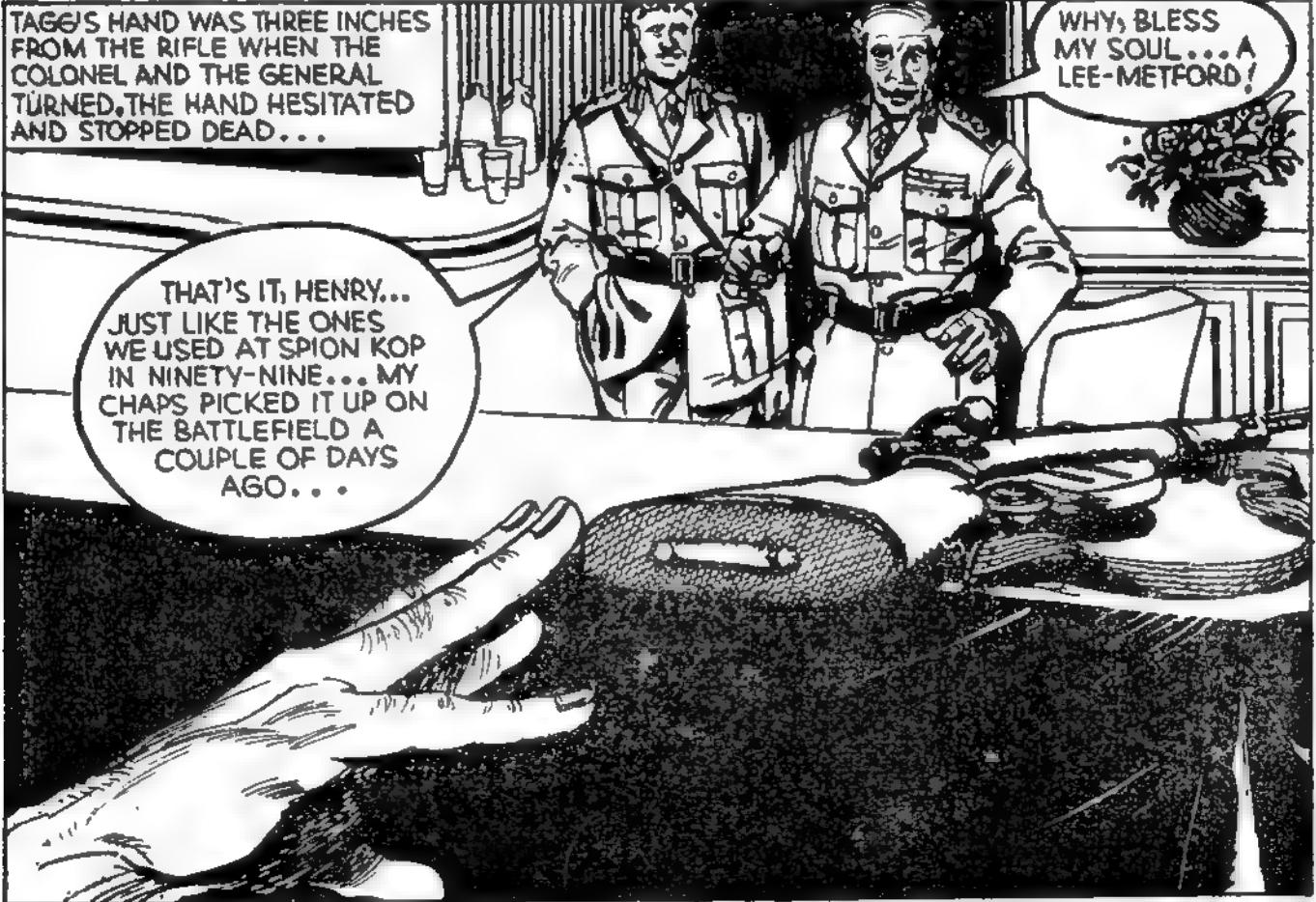
SEE TO IT, WILL YOU, MAJOR? NOW, HENRY, I'VE SOMETHING RATHER SPECIAL TO SHOW YOU...



TAGG'S HAND WAS THREE INCHES FROM THE RIFLE WHEN THE COLONEL AND THE GENERAL TURNED. THE HAND HESITATED AND STOPPED DEAD...

WHY, BLESS MY SOUL... A LEE-METFORD!

THAT'S IT, HENRY... JUST LIKE THE ONES WE USED AT SPION KOP IN NINETY-NINE... MY CHAPS PICKED IT UP ON THE BATTLEFIELD A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO...



THE GENERAL AMBLED TOWARDS THE RIFLE. HIS NEXT WORDS STRUCK TERROR INTO THE HEART OF CORPORAL TAGG . . .

THIS IS A SPLENDID GIFT, CEDRIC! I'M DELIGHTED! I'LL HAVE IT MOUNTED ON THE WALL OF MY CARAVAN!



TAGG LOST HIS HEAD THEN. HE SAW HIS PRECIOUS RIFLE DISAPPEARING TO A PLACE WHERE EVEN HE COULD NOT RETRIEVE IT. HE GRABBED IT FAST . . .

WHAT
IN THE NAME
OF —



Snarl Of Battle

THE OPEN FRENCH WINDOW WAS TOO FAR AWAY TO MAKE A GETAWAY. TAGG CLUTCHED THE RIFLE AND WHEELED TOWARDS THE WINDOW DIRECTLY BEHIND HIM...



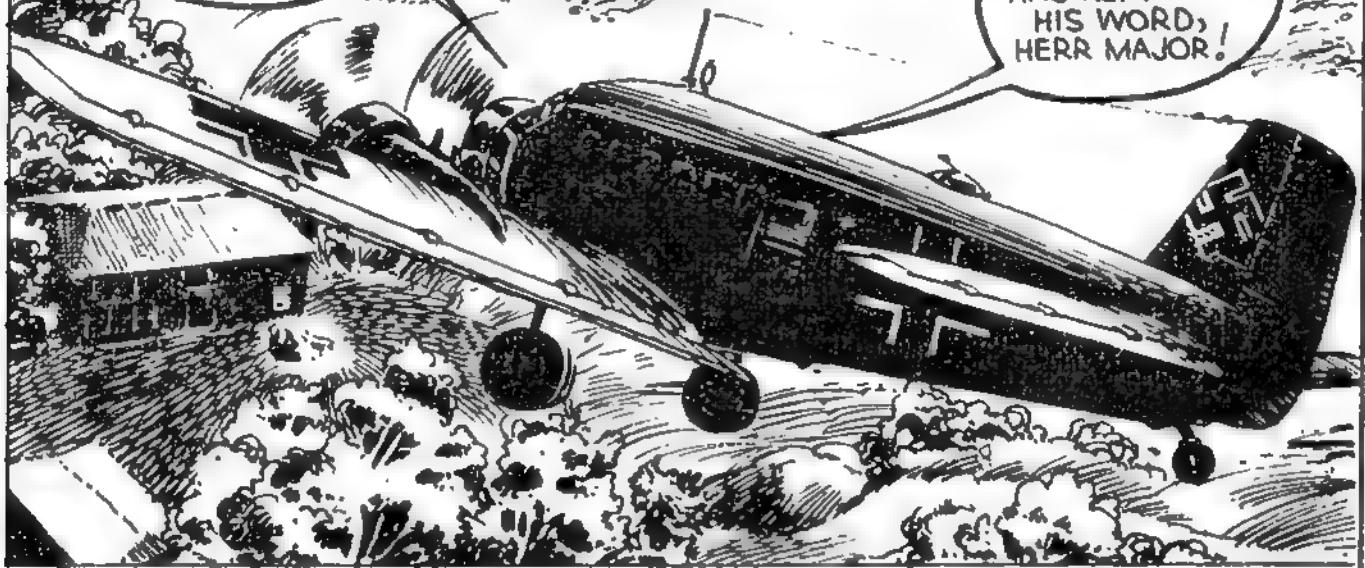
TAGG WENT OUT OF THE WINDOW BY THE QUICKEST WAY—HE HURLED HIMSELF THROUGH IT BODILY, THE THICK BLACKOUT CURTAIN PROTECTING HIM FROM THE SPLINTERING GLASS, A FLOOD OF LIGHT BURST OUT ON TO THE LAWN...



BUT THAT FLOOD OF LIGHT WAS SPOTTED — FROM EIGHT HUNDRED FEET ABOVE THE VILLA . . .

THERE IS THE SIGNAL, THE UNCURTAINED WINDOW IN THE VILLA! THE TARGET IS BELOW, PILOT!

SO CAPPODOCCI HAS KEPT HIS WORD, HERR MAJOR!



THE AIRCRAFT WAS A JUNKERS 52. THE OFFICERS WERE GERMAN PARATROOPERS AND THE FLIGHT COMPARTMENT WAS PACKED WITH ENEMY SKY TROOPS . . .

I KNEW CAPPODOCCI WOULD HELP US TO CAPTURE THE BRITISH GENERAL BY BREAKING INTO THE VILLA AND SHOWING US A LIGHT . . .

IT WAS A BRILLIANT PLAN OF YOURS, HERR MAJOR, TO USE SUCH A SPY.



Snarl Of Battle

FIVE HUNDRED FEET ABOVE THE TERRACE WHERE THE GENERAL AND THE OFFICERS OF THE SOUTH LOUGHSHIRES WERE HUNTING FOR CORPORAL TAGG, A COMPANY OF GERMAN PARATROOPERS PLUMMETED EARTHWARDS...



LIKE THE OLD SOLDIER HE WAS, CORPORAL TAGG HAD AVOIDED ALL THE EXCITEMENT BY REMAINING HIDDEN BENEATH THE CURTAIN. WHEN HE DID PEEP OUT, A MINUTE LATER, THE VISITORS WERE JUST ARRIVING...



THE BRITISH OFFICERS WERE DRESSED FOR DINNER, NOT FOR BATTLE. THEY PUT UP A STOUT RESISTANCE, BUT THE GERMANS WERE TOO TOUGH AND TOO WELL-ARMED...



CORPORAL TAGG, STILL HIDDEN, HAD SO FAR REMAINED UNNOTICED BY THE GERMANS. BUT AS HE DECIDED TO MAKE A BREAK FOR IT...



CORPORAL TAGG WAS MORE CONCERNED FOR HIS RIFLE THAN FOR THE GENERAL, THE OFFICERS OF THE SOUTH LOUGHSHIRES AND EVEN HIS OWN SAFETY. BUT HE WAS NOT DESTINED TO GET AWAY WITH IT SO EASILY...



Snarl Of Battle

THE GENERAL AND THE OFFICERS, NOW UNDER CLOSE GUARD, HAD ONLY CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF CORPORAL TAGG'S BACK IN THE MESS-ROOM. TO THEM, HE WAS JUST A FELLOW-SOLDIER IN DISTRESS...



IN FACT, IT WAS THE FATE OF HIS BELOVED RIFLE WHICH WAS UPSETTING CORPORAL TAGG. HE HAD ONLY RECOVERED IT FOR A COUPLE OF MINUTES, AND NOW HE HAD LOST IT AGAIN...



IT WAS BARELY TWO MINUTES SINCE THE GERMAN PARATROOPERS HAD STRUCK. THE GROUNDS OF THE VILLA CAPPODOCCI WERE SPACIOUS, THE RAIDERS HAD BEEN SWIFT AND SILENT, AND A SINGLE BURST OF SCHMEISSER FIRE ACCOUNTED FOR THE BEWILDERED HEADQUARTERS GUARD...



THE GERMAN PARATROOPERS AND THEIR PRISONERS MELTED INTO THE DARKNESS, HEADING FOR THE FRONT LINES. IT WAS HUMILIATING FOR THE HELPLESS BRITISH OFFICERS. FOR CORPORAL TAGG, IT WAS SHEER TORTURE . . .



Chapter 3. The Armoury

SIX HOURS LATER, MOVING LIKE SHADOWS AND AVOIDING TROUBLE, THE GERMAN PARATROOPERS REACHED THE FRONT LINE WITH THEIR PRISONERS. THE DAWN BARRAGE WAS BLANKETING THE BRITISH POSITIONS . . .



THE GERMANS HAD PLANNED THIS OPERATION CAREFULLY. THEY HAD CHOSEN A RETURN ROUTE WHICH TOOK THEM THROUGH A THINLY-DEFENDED AREA OF THE BRITISH LINES. BY DAWN, THEY WERE SAFELY THROUGH . . .



WITHOUT FIRING A SHOT DURING THEIR PERILOUS FIFTEEN MILE MARCH, THE GERMAN PARATROOPERS REACHED THEIR RENDEZVOUS AN HOUR LATER...



STIFF, SORE, THOROUGHLY FED-UP, THE BRITISH PRISONERS WERE HERDED INTO AN ARMY TRUCK WHILE THE GERMAN OFFICERS TALKED...



Snarl Of Battle

THE TWO TRUCKS HEADED NORTH TOWARDS THE GERMAN REAR...

DID ANY OF YOU FELLOWS UNDERSTAND WHAT THOSE TWO JERRIES WERE NATTERING ABOUT?

YOU SPEAK THE LINGO, DON'T YOU, MAJOR?

THE JERRIES PLAN TO ATTACK AT DUSK TONIGHT, COLONEL, PROBABLY AGAINST THE POSITIONS OCCUPIED BY THE LOUGHSHIRES. THEY RECKON THAT, WITHOUT OUR R.H.Q. STAFF AND THE GENERAL, THE OPPosition WILL BE HOPELESSLY DISORGANISED...



THE TRUCKS TURNED INTO THE WIDE ASPHALT YARD OF A SOLID-LOOKING ARMY BARRACKS...

I'M AFRAID THE JERRIES WILL GO THROUGH OUR LINES LIKE A HOT KNIFE THROUGH BUTTER... WE MUST KEEP OUR EYES OPEN FOR A WAY OF ESCAPE...

YOU WILL ALRIGHT, PRISONERS!

SCHMIDT... YOU KNOW WHERE TO PUT THOSE CAPTURED WEAPONS...



THE BRITISH OFFICERS PEERED DESPERATELY AROUND FOR A WAY OF ESCAPE AS THEY CLIMBED OUT OF THE TRUCK. CORPORAL TAGG PEERED JUST AS DESPERATELY, BUT FOR ANOTHER REASON...

TAKE THE PRISONERS TO THE DETENTION BLOCK UNTIL I HAVE NOTIFIED HIGH COMMAND!

THERE GOES MY POOR OLD LEE-METFORD... BUT AT LEAST IT'S NOT FAR AWAY...

JAWOHL, HERR MAJOR!



CORPORAL TAGG HAD A ONE-TRACK MIND AS FAR AS HIS LEE-METFORD WAS CONCERNED. HE HAD BEEN WORRIED ALL NIGHT BY THE FEAR OF LOSING SIGHT OF IT. NOW HIS SPIRITS ROSE...

SO THAT'S WHERE THEY'RE PUTTING IT, ARE THEY...

GET IN... MOVE!



Snari Of Battle

EVEN THE FACT THAT HE WAS A PRISONER BEHIND THE GERMAN LINES DID NOT DEPRESS CORPORAL TAGG. HIS RIFLE WAS ONLY A MATTER OF A FEW YARDS AWAY FROM HIM NOW...

WE'VE HAD IT, CHAPS... WE'LL NEVER GET OUT OF THIS RAT TRAP...

YOU SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, TOSH... I'LL COLLAR THAT RIFLE OF MINE IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO...

WAIT... THAT MAN THERE IS NOT AN OFFICER! GET HIM OUT AND BRING HIM TO THE MAJOR...

ONE OF THE TWO ARMED GUARDS HUSTLED CORPORAL TAGG OUT OF THE CELL. TAGG EYED HIM THOUGHTFULLY. HE WAS A BULKY MAN...

KEEP A STIFF UPPER LIP, MY MAN...

YOU BET, GENERAL... ALL RIGHT, TOSH, I'M COMING...

WALK, ENGLANDER! SCHNELL!

BUT THE GERMAN'S BULK WAS FAT, NOT MUSCLE. HE WAS SLUGGISHLY WATCHING HIS COMPANION LOCK THE DOOR OF THE CELL WHEN CORPORAL TAGG HIT HIM . . .



THE SECOND GUARD WHEELED SHAKILY. TAGG MEASURED HIM WITH A LEFT AND DROPPED HIM WITH A RIGHT THAT TRAVELED SIX EXPLOSIVE INCHES . . .



OH, RATTLING
GOOD SHOW,
CORPORAL...THIS
IS OUR CHANCE,
CHAPS...

Snarl Of Battle

THE JUBILANT BRITISH OFFICERS CROWDED TO THE DOOR OF THE CELL. BUT CORPORAL TAGG HAD OTHER THINGS ON HIS MIND... OR TO BE PRECISE, ONE OTHER THING...



CORPORAL TAGG TURNED RELUCTANTLY TO LOOK AT THE PURPLE FACES BEHIND THE BARS. HE WAS WASTING PRECIOUS TIME, BUT HE WENT BACK...



GRUMBLING, CORPORAL TAGG DUMPED THE TWO GUARDS IN THE EMPTY CELL. THE OFFICERS WERE ALREADY FILING ALONG THE CORRIDOR BEHIND THE GENERAL . . .



THE TWO TRUCKS WERE STILL STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE YARD. A FEW GERMAN SOLDIERS WERE MOVING ABOUT, BUT NO-ONE SAW THE FURTIVE FIGURES SLIP FROM THE SHADOW OF THE DETENTION BLOCK . . .



Snarl Of Battle

THE GENERAL SURVEYED THE SITUATION WITH A PRACTISED BUT PESSIMISTIC EYE. BUT CORPORAL TAGG, BEHIND HIM, WAS PAYING NO ATTENTION...



TAGG'S SURVEY OF THE SITUATION WAS MUCH MORE HOPEFUL. BUT ALL HE WANTED WAS HIS RIFLE. HE TRIED ONE OF THE KEYS HE HAD TAKEN FROM THE GUARD IN THE DETENTION BLOCK...



TAGG OPENED THE DOOR AND SLIPPED INTO THE SHED. HE STARED AMAZED. HIS RIFLE MIGHT BE HERE, BUT SO WERE A COUPLE OF THOUSAND OTHERS!



THE SHED WAS, IN FACT, AN ARMOURY, AS THE GENERAL REALISED WHEN HE FOLLOWED TAGG INSIDE...



THE BRITISH OFFICERS FELL ON THE WEAPONS ZESTFULLY. BUT THE MAN WHO HAD LED THEM TO THE ARMOURY WAS MORE FUSSY...



Snarl Of Battle

THERE WERE STACKS OF SCHMEISSERS IN THE ARMOURY, MOUNDS OF MAUSERS, LASHINGS OF LUGERS. BUT THERE WAS NO SIGN OF A LEE-METFORD...



IT WAS CORPORAL TAGG WHO HAD FREED THE PRISONERS AND GIVEN THEM THE MEANS TO ESCAPE, BUT HIS HEART WAS NOT IN THE JOB NOW...



EVEN WHEN THE PRISONERS STORMED OUT INTO THE BARRACK YARD BEHIND A HAIL OF LEAD, TAGG'S ONE-TRACK MIND WAS STILL PREOCCUPIED WITH HIS RIFLE...



TAKEN BY SURPRISE AND LASHED BY THEIR OWN GUNS, THE GERMANS WERE PINNED BACK LONG ENOUGH FOR THE PRISONERS TO REACH THE NEAREST TRUCK AND BOARD IT...



THE GENERAL SLAMMED THE TRUCK INTO GEAR. AS IT LUMBERED FORWARD, THE GERMANS CONVERGED ON IT FROM THREE SIDES, FIRING WILDLY...



Snarl Of Battle



AS LONG AS THERE WAS NO HOPE OF RETRIEVING HIS BELOVED RIFLE, CORPORAL TAGG WAS WILLING TO ESCAPE WITH THE REST OF THE PRISONERS. BUT THAT LAST ACCURATE BULLET HAD CHANGED EVERYTHING...



EVEN IF IT MEANT DEFYING THE ENTIRE GERMAN ARMY, CORPORAL TAGG WAS GOING TO GET BACK HIS RIFLE...



Chapter 4. One-Man Blitz

IT LOOKED ALMOST AS THOUGH CORPORAL TAGG WOULD HAVE TO DEFY THE ENTIRE GERMAN ARMY. A PARTY OF SOLDIERS CAME RUNNING AROUND THE CORNER FROM THE BARRACKS AS THE TRUCK ROARED AWAY...



TAGG DID NOT CARE. THERE WAS A GERMAN STANDING RIGHT IN FRONT OF HIS HIDING PLACE IN THE ROCKS, AND HE WAS THE VERY GERMAN TAGG HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR...



TAGG WAS HALF OUT OF THE ROCKS AND HIS HAND HAD ALMOST GRASPED HIS PRECIOUS RIFLE WHEN THE SECOND ARMY TRUCK CAME ROARING AROUND THE CORNER...



THE TRUCK PULLED UP SHARPLY OPPOSITE CORPORAL TAGG. THE GERMAN SOLDIERS BEGAN TO PILE ABOARD. TAGG WAS BEGINNING TO GET ANGRY...



AS THE TRUCK LUMBERED FORWARD, GATHERING SPEED, TAGG FLUNG HIMSELF AT THE SIDE OF THE CANVAS HOOD...



Snarl Of Battle

TAGG PULLED HIMSELF UP BY THE STEEL HOOD SUPPORTS AND FLATTENED HIMSELF ON TOP. THE TRUCK WAS BOWLING DOWN THE ROAD TOWARDS THE FRONT LINE...

KEEP GOING,
DRIVER...OUR ARMY
LAUNCHES THE ATTACK
ON THE BRITISH AT DUSK. WE
MUST RECAPTURE THEIR
GENERAL BEFORE
ZERO HOUR...



TEN MINUTES LATER, TAGG FELT THE TRUCK SLACKEN SPEED. THE TRUCK STOLEN BY THE GENERAL AND HIS ESCAPEES WAS STANDING ABANDONED ON THE ROAD AHEAD...

HALT, DRIVER! THE ENGLANDERS
MUST BE MAKING FOR THEIR
OWN LINES ON FOOT!
WE SHALL FOLLOW
THEM!

JAWOHL,
HERR MAJOR!



THE GERMAN PARATROOPERS SCRAMBLED OFF THE TRUCK AS IT BRAKED, CROUCHING ON TOP OF THE CANVAS HOOD; TAGG FOLLOWED HIS PRECIOUS RIFLE WITH HUNGRY EYES...

FOLLOW ME!

I'LL FOLLOW YOU ALL RIGHT, TOSH... AS LONG AS THAT BLOKE'S GOT MY RIFLE...



THE GERMAN ATTACK, TIMED FOR SEVENTEEN HUNDRED HOURS, WAS IMMINENT. AN ECHELON OF PANTHER TANKS WAS HEADING TOWARDS THE FRONT AS TAGG PAUSED ON TOP OF THE TRUCK...

ADVANCE FIFTY METRES AND HALT TO FORM LINE ABREAST!



Snarl Of Battle

TAGG WAS BUSY WATCHING THE DIRECTION TAKEN BY THE GERMAN PARATROOPS. HE ONLY SAW THE TANKS WHEN THE LEADING ONE DREW ALONGSIDE THE TRUCK AND BLOCKED HIS VIEW...



BY THIS TIME, CORPORAL TAGG WAS GETTING RILED. HIS RIFLE HAD DISAPPEARED FROM VIEW AGAIN, AND THAT ALONE WAS ENOUGH TO MAKE HIM FURIOUS . . .



THE TANKS WERE FORMING IN LINE ABREAST. THE ONLY VIEW TAGG GOT FROM THE TURRET OF THE FIRST TANK WAS OF THE SECOND TANK DRAWING ALONGSIDE. SO HE MOVED OVER TO THE SECOND, TO THE DISMAY OF ITS COMMANDER...



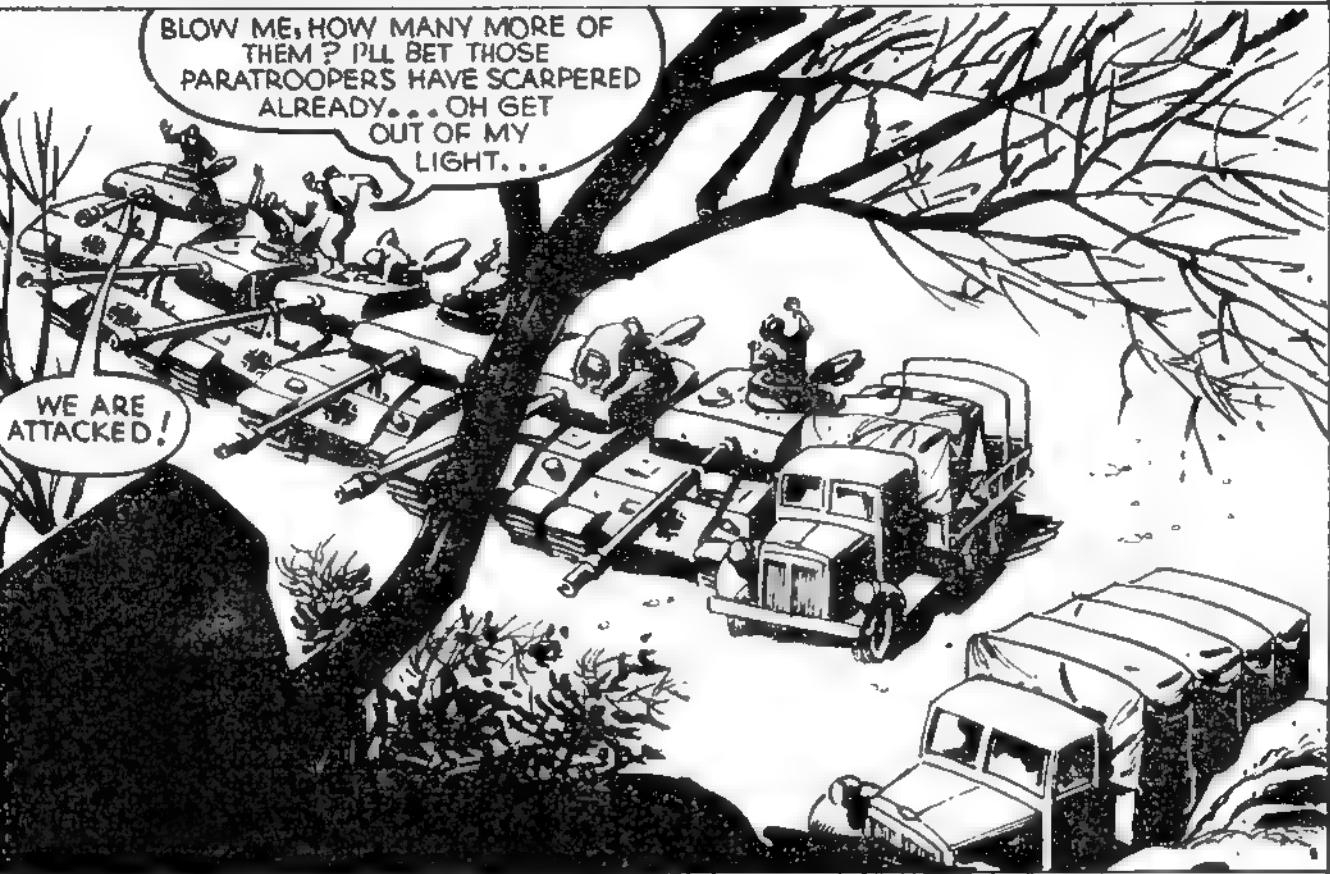
TAGG PLOUGHED DOGGEDLY ON ACROSS THE SECOND TANK TO THE THIRD TANK, DEALING WITH THE STARTLED GERMAN COMMANDERS AS HE WENT. THEY WERE NOT USED TO SUCH TREATMENT...



Snarl Of Battle

THERE WERE SIX PANTHERS IN THE TROOP. THEY PULLED ALONGSIDE ONE ANOTHER IN TURN. WITH HIS VIEW REPEATEDLY BLOCKED, CORPORAL TAGG WAS REALLY GETTING MAD...

BLOW ME, HOW MANY MORE OF THEM? I'LL BET THOSE PARATROOPERS HAVE SCARPERED ALREADY... OH GET OUT OF MY LIGHT...



AT GERMAN BATTLE HEADQUARTERS, THE REPORT FROM THE TANK ECHELON CAUSED GRAVE CONCERN...

THE BRITISH MUST HAVE A WHOLE COMPANY OF INFANTRY BEHIND OUR LINES TO CAUSE SUCH HAVOC... SIX OF OUR TANKS ATTACKED...



Snarl Of Battle

47

BUT THE GENERAL'S CONCERN WAS NOT AS GREAT AS CORPORAL TAGG'S. WHEN HE HAD REACHED THE SIXTH AND LAST TANK, THE PARATROOPERS HAD DISAPPEARED. HE SET OFF WRATHFULLY TO FIND THEM...



THE GERMAN ATTACK WAS NOW ALMOST DUE. ON A RIDGE TO THE EAST OF THE ECHELON OF TANKS, AN INFANTRY CAPTAIN CONSULTED HIS WATCH...



Snarl Of Battle

CORPORAL TAGG, TOILING UP THE SLOPE AT THAT MOMENT, SAW THE LINE OF SQUAT GERMAN HELMETS ALONG THE RIDGE. HIS EYES GLEAMED...



TAGG'S WAY OF FINDING OUT WAS CRUDE BUT EFFECTIVE. HE STARTED ON THE GERMAN AT THE END OF THE LINE...



THE GERMANS WERE A YARD APART, AND TOO INTENT ON THE BRITISH TRENCHES AHEAD TO NOTICE TAGG. HE BEGAN TO WORK METHODICALLY ALONG THE LINE...

UGGH!

NO...
YOU'VE GOT
A MAUSER...
SORRY YOU'VE BEEN
TROUBLED, MATE...



THE GERMAN CAPTAIN WAS STILL GIVING HIS ORDERS, BUT ONLY A COUPLE OF HIS MEN WERE LISTENING TO HIM NOW.

OUFFF—

GET READY, MEN...



Snarl Of Battle



THE SIGNALLER AND THE CAPTAIN SAW CORPORAL TAGG AT THE SAME MOMENT. THE CAPTAIN'S INTEREST WAS SHORT-LIVED, BUT THE SIGNALLER GRABBED HIS TRANSMITTER.



THE ORDER TO WITHDRAW AND THE HAIL OF BRITISH SHELLS WHICH FELL AROUND THEM AT THE SAME MOMENT, CAUSED UTTER CONFUSION IN THE GERMAN RANKS . . .



MEANWHILE, THE MAN WHO HAD HALTED THE GERMAN ATTACK SINGLEHANDED WAS STILL LOOKING DOGGEDLY FOR HIS RIFLE . . .



BUT, NEXT MOMENT, CORPORAL TAGG'S LUCK CHANGED. WHEN HE DUCKED AT THE NEXT SHELLBURST, HIS LEE-METFORD WAS SIX INCHES FROM HIS NOSE !





Snarl Of Battle

ALREADY SHAKEN BY THE COUNTERMANDED ATTACK AND THE BRITISH SHELLING, THE GERMAN PARATROOPERS WERE BEGINNING TO REGRET THEIR ZEAL...



CORPORAL TAGG WAS FIGHTING MAD, BUT HE WAS MADDER STILL WHEN THE LOUGHSHIRE MAJOR HORNED IN ON HIS PRIVATE BATTLE AND THE LEE-METFORD FLEW UP INTO THE AIR.



THE GERMAN ATTACK HAD ALREADY FAILED, AND THE PARATROOPERS HAD SUFFERED ENOUGH AT THE HANDS OF THEIR UNRULY BRITISH PRISONERS. THEY FLED . . .



THE STAR SHELLS SPLUTTERED AND DIED OUT. DARKNESS AND SILENCE SETTLED OVER NO-MAN'S LAND AGAIN. IT WAS A DARKNESS WHICH EFFECTIVELY HID CORPORAL TAGG'S PRECIOUS RIFLE . . .



Chapter 5. Bullseye!

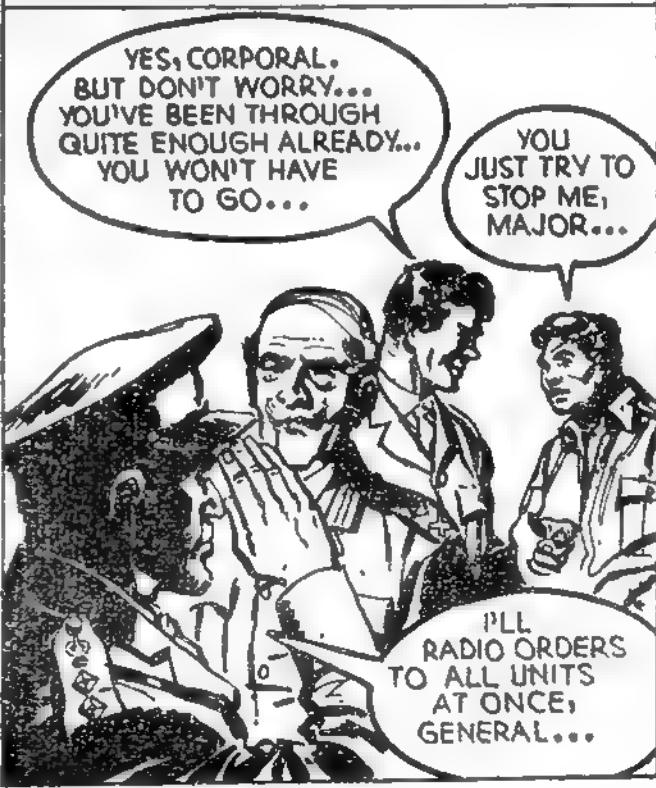
TEN MINUTES LATER, THE GENERAL AND HIS PARTY REACHED THE BRITISH LINES. JUBILANT SOLDIERS LED THEM TO THEIR ADVANCED HEADQUARTERS. BUT THE GENERAL WAS NOT A MAN TO REST ON HIS LAURELS...



WRAPPED IN GLOOM, CORPORAL TAGG HAD BEEN DRAGGED BACK TO THE BRITISH LINES. NOW, AS HE LISTENED TO THE GENERAL, HE METHODICALLY STRIPPED THE BANDAGE FROM HIS HEAD...



CORPORAL TAGG HAD A ONE-TRACK MIND. NOW IT SEEMED THAT THE WHOLE BRITISH ARMY WAS GOING TO FOLLOW THAT TRACK TOWARDS THE GERMAN LINES AND HIS BELOVED RIFLE...



AN HOUR LATER, TAGG ATTACHED HIMSELF TO A PLATOON OF THE SOUTH LOUGHSHIRES ON THE START LINE. THE BRITISH GUNS HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO SOFTEN-UP THE GERMAN POSITIONS ON THE RIDGE AHEAD.



AN HOUR AFTER DUSK, WITH STAR SHELLS CASTING A LURID GLOW OVER NO-MAN'S LAND, THE BRITISH INFANTRY LUNGED FORWARD IN A FURIOUS ATTACK...



Snarl Of Battle

CORPORAL TAGG WENT WITH THEM. HE WAS ALONGSIDE THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT OF THE LOUGHSHIRES WHEN THE GERMAN MACHINE-GUN BEGAN TO STUTTER FROM THE RIDGE...

KEEP GOING, MEN.
KEEP GOING!

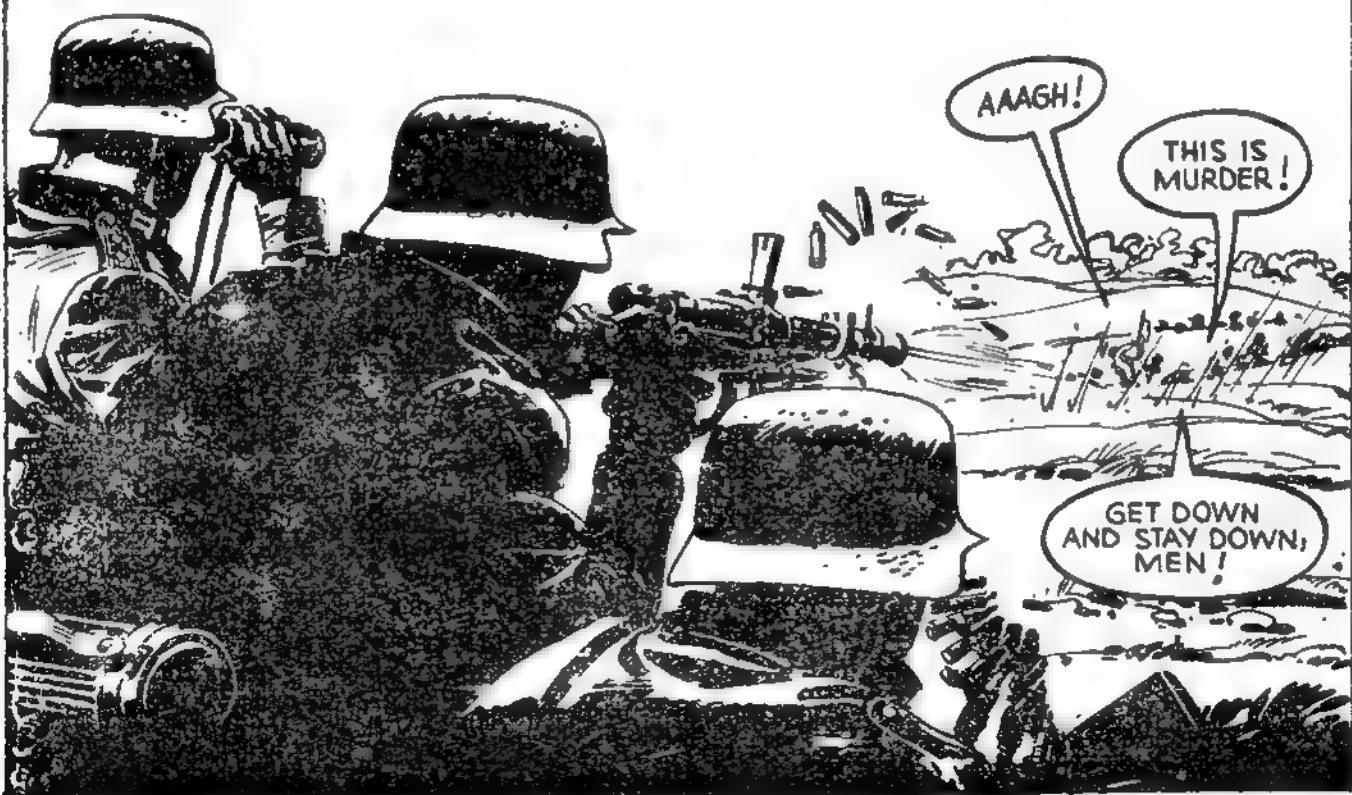


THE ENEMY MACHINE-GUN WAS WELL SITED. THE HAIL OF BULLETS SWEPT ACROSS THE EXPOSED SLOPE TO CUT DOWN THE BRITISH INFANTRY TOILING UP FROM BELOW. THE ATTACK FALTERED...

AAAGH!

THIS IS
MURDER!

GET DOWN
AND STAY DOWN,
MEN!



CORPORAL TAGG WENT TO GROUND WITH THE REST OF THE SHAKEN BRITISH INFANTRYMEN, BUT, UNLIKE THEM, HE HAD NOT LOST INTEREST IN THE BULLET-LASHED SLOPE AHEAD. . .

THE LIGHT'S GLINTING
ON SOMETHING UP
THERE! IT COULD BE
METAL— HERE,
LIEUTENANT, LEND
ME YOUR
GLASSES!

TAGG FOCUSED THE FIELD GLASSES ON THE SLOPE TWO HUNDRED YARDS ABOVE. THE LIGHT WAS GLINTING ON METAL ALL RIGHT. THE METAL WAS THE STEEL BACKPLATE OF A RIFLE, AND THE RIFLE WAS A LEE-METFORD.



TAGG GOT TO HIS FEET. HE WAS GRINNING HAPPILY. THE GERMAN MACHINE-GUN WAS STILL TRAVERSING THE SLOPE BUT TAGG PAID NO ATTENTION TO IT. . .

THANKS,
LIEUTENANT...
THAT'S ALL I
WANTED TO
KNOW...

HERE,
STEADY ON, MAN!
THAT JERRY MACHINE-
GUN'S DEAD
AHEAD!



Snarl Of Battle

CORPORAL TAGG TROTTED HAPPILY FORWARD, A LONELY FIGURE IN THE GLARING HELL OF NO-MAN'S LAND. AND AN ARMY HELD ITS BREATH AND WATCHED HIM GO...

COME BACK, CORPORAL—
YOU CAN'T
GO IT
ALONE!



ANOTHER ARMY WATCHED CORPORAL TAGG FROM THE HEIGHTS ABOVE, BUT IT DID NOT HOLD ITS BREATH...

SHOOT
DOWN THE CRAZY
ENGLANDER!

TRAVERSE
RIGHT!
SCHNELL!



BUT CORPORAL TAGG WAS NEITHER MAD, NOR WAS HE A HERO: HE WAS JUST A MAN WHO LOVED HIS RIFLE...

THERE IT
IS...AT LAST...
MY OLD LEE-
METFORD!



THE MACHINE-GUN BULLETS HISSED AROUND TAGG'S HEAD. HE NEVER HEARD THEM. HIS PRECIOUS RIFLE WAS IN HIS HANDS AGAIN AND NOTHING ELSE MATTERED...

GOT IT BACK
AT LAST... COR-
THERE'S ONE UP
THE SPOUT!

EEEGH!



Snarl Of Battle



THE VICTORIOUS BRITISH SOLDIERS POURED UPWARDS TO SEIZE THE RIDGE. ON THEIR WAY THEY PASSED A SMALL AND HAPPY CORPORAL WITH A RIFLE CLASPED TIGHTLY IN HIS ARMS...

FROM NOW ON I'M NOT LETTING THIS THING OUT OF MY SIGHT... THE TROUBLE I'VE HAD CHASING IT AROUND!



AN HOUR LATER, ON THE CAPTURED RIDGE, THE GENERAL AND HIS STAFF SURVEYED THE FIELD OF BATTLE...

THE POLDAVO FRONT'S BROKEN WIDE OPEN, GENERAL... THAT WAS A MAGNIFICENT PLAN— TO ATTACK AT SHORT NOTICE...

ALL IN THE DAY'S WORK, COLONEL, Y'KNOW...

THE GENERAL AMBLED SMUGLY AWAY. THERE WAS A CORPORAL SITTING ON THE SANDBAGGED MACHINE-GUN EMPLACEMENT A FEW YARDS AWAY, POLISHING A RIFLE...

WHAT WILL THEY GIVE THE GENERAL FOR THIS NIGHT'S WORK, DO YOU THINK, SIR?

A KNIGHTHOOD... A COUPLE OF MEDALS, PERHAPS. BUT THE MAN WHO WON THE POLDAVO BATTLE DESERVES THEM ALL, DARN IT!



Snarl Of Battle

THE MAN WHO HAD REALLY WON THE POLDAVO BATTLE WOULD GET NEITHER A KNIGHTHOOD, NOR A MEDAL. BUT HE WOULD NOT HAVE WANTED THEM, ANYWAY...



CORPORAL TAGG HAD HIS RIFLE BACK, AND THAT WAS ALL HE HAD EVER WANTED...

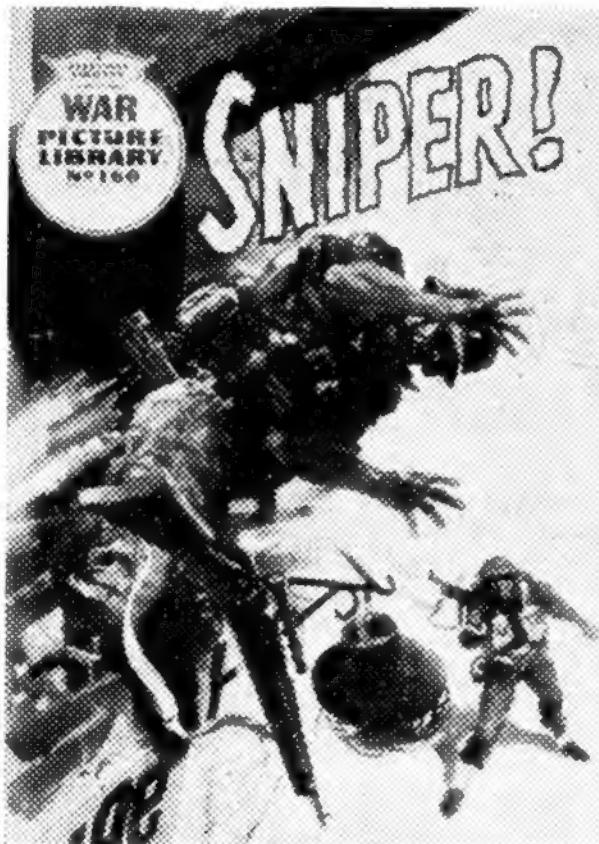
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